HOW SEATTLE HAS FAILED ITS INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES
Complete Intelligence Synthesis

STARTING WITH THE GROUND TRUTH

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BEFORE ANY ANALYSIS:

Seattle is built on stolen land.
Not metaphorically.
Not historically in a distant sense.
Literally and legally.

The city exists because Indigenous people
were removed from their territories
through a combination of:
• Broken treaty promises
• Physical violence
• Deliberate cultural destruction
• Legal mechanisms designed to
  transfer land from Indigenous
  to non-Indigenous ownership
• Systematic erasure of Indigenous
  presence from public memory

Everything that follows happens
on that foundation.
Understanding that foundation is not
optional context.
It is the entire frame.

The question is not only
"how has Seattle failed Indigenous communities"
but
"what does it mean for a city built on
Indigenous land to claim it serves
those same Indigenous communities?"

That question has no comfortable answer.
This synthesis will not pretend otherwise.
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WHO WE ARE TALKING ABOUT

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THE PEOPLES WHOSE LAND THIS IS:

DUWAMISH PEOPLE:
• Original people of Seattle
• "People of the Inside" —
  dxʷdəwʔabš in their own language
• Lived on both shores of what is now
  called Elliott Bay for thousands of years
• Chief Seeathl (Seattle) was Duwamish
• The city bears his name
• His people have no federal recognition
• No reservation
• No treaty rights enforcement
• Fighting for recognition for 30+ years
• Denied federal recognition in 2001
  reversed in 2009 then reversed again
• Currently without federal recognition
• Living in the city named after
  their most celebrated leader
• Largely invisible in that city's
  official policies and programs

MUCKLESHOOT INDIAN TRIBE:
• Federally recognized
• Reservation southeast of Seattle
• Significant urban population in King County
• Traditional territory includes
  much of what is now greater Seattle

SUQUAMISH TRIBE:
• Federally recognized
• Reservation across Puget Sound
• Traditional territory includes
  Seattle shorelines
• Chief Seattle's paternal homeland

TULALIP TRIBES:
• Federally recognized
• Reservation north of Seattle
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• Significant connections to
  urban Indigenous population

PUYALLUP TRIBE:
• Federally recognized
• Reservation in Tacoma area
• Treaty rights in Seattle area waters
• Significant urban population

URBAN INDIGENOUS POPULATION:
• 35,000+ Indigenous people in King County
• Representing 200+ tribal nations
• Many NOT from local tribes —
  relocated through federal relocation programs
• Many from Alaska Native communities
• Many from Great Plains tribes
• Many from Southwest tribes
• Diverse and complex population
  not reducible to local tribal identity

THE CRITICAL DISTINCTION:
Seattle policy tends to address
either federally recognized tribes
(government-to-government relations)
or the urban Indigenous population
(social services)
but rarely understands the full complexity
of who is actually here and what they need.

The Duwamish — the people whose land
this most directly is —
fall into neither category cleanly
because they lack federal recognition.
They are therefore systematically
excluded from programs designed
for either group.
This is the foundational policy failure.
Everything else flows from it.
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## **THE TREATY BETRAYAL — WHERE IT STARTED**
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THE POINT ELLIOTT TREATY (1855):

Signed January 22, 1855.
On the shores of what is now Mukilteo.

What was promised to Indigenous peoples:
• Reserved rights to fish, hunt, and gather
  in traditional territories
• Healthcare
• Education
• Land reservations as permanent homelands
• Protection of tribal sovereignty

What actually happened:

BROKEN PROMISE 1: FISHING RIGHTS
Treaty guaranteed fishing rights.
For nearly 100 years:
• State of Washington prosecuted
  Indigenous people for fishing
  in their own treaty-guaranteed waters
• Courts sided with state
• Indigenous fishers arrested,
  boats seized, nets destroyed
• Fishing was not a cultural preference —
  it was survival, identity, and
  sacred responsibility
• The state treated treaty rights
  as suggestions until:

1974: BOLDT DECISION
Federal Judge George Boldt ruled that
treaty tribes were entitled to 50%
of harvestable fish.
The state had been violating treaties
for 119 years.
119 years.

Response from non-Indigenous Washington:
• Riots
• Violence against tribal fishers
• Non-Indigenous fishers cutting
  tribal fishing lines
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• State officials who had violated
treaties for over a century
refusing to implement the ruling

Seattle's response:
Largely silence.
No official accountability.
No apology.
No material reparation for
119 years of treaty violation.

BROKEN PROMISE 2: DUWAMISH EXCLUSION
The Duwamish signed the Point Elliott Treaty.
They were promised a reservation.
The reservation was never established.
Their land was taken anyway.
They received none of the promised protections.
They were declared non-existent
as a political entity.
They continued to exist as a people.
The federal government continued to
pretend they did not.

This is not ancient history.
The Duwamish are still fighting
for the recognition promised to them
in 1855.
171 years later.

BROKEN PROMISE 3: HEALTHCARE
Treaty promised healthcare.
Indian Health Service (IHS) was established
but chronically underfunded.
Urban Indigenous people who leave
reservation areas lose IHS access.
The treaty right to healthcare does not
follow Indigenous people to cities.
Seattle — built on treaty land —
has never created adequate healthcare
infrastructure to fulfill the treaty's
healthcare promise to urban
Indigenous residents.

BROKEN PROMISE 4: EDUCATION

Treaty promised education.
What the federal government actually
delivered was the residential school system —
which did not educate Indigenous children
but systematically:
• Separated children from families
• Destroyed language and culture
• Subjected children to abuse
• Killed thousands of children
• Traumatized generations

The Chemawa Indian School in Oregon
served many Pacific Northwest children.
The trauma of that system lives in
Seattle's Indigenous community today.
Intergenerational trauma is not a metaphor.
It is a measurable neurological reality
that affects healthcare outcomes,
educational attainment,
family stability, and economic mobility
in Indigenous communities right now.
In 2026.
In Seattle.

THE FOUNDATIONAL POINT:
Every failure that follows is built
on this foundation of treaty betrayal.
When Seattle fails its Indigenous community,
it is not creating new failures.
It is continuing a failure that
has never stopped since 1855.
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## **THE DUWAMISH — THE CITY'S DEEPEST FAILURE**

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THE SITUATION:

Chief Seeathl gave his name to this city.
The Duwamish are his people.
Seattle exists on Duwamish land.

The Duwamish:
- Have no federal recognition
- Have no reservation
- Have no treaty rights enforcement
- Have no access to federal
  Indian healthcare programs
- Have no access to federal
  Indian education programs
- Have no access to federal
  tribal economic development programs
- Have one longhouse:
  The Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center
  in West Seattle
- Have approximately 600 enrolled members
  most of whom live in Seattle

THE RECOGNITION BATTLE:

1977: Duwamish petition for federal recognition
1996: Branch of Acknowledgment and Research
recommends recognition
2001: Clinton administration finalizes recognition
January 19, 2001 — one day before
Clinton leaves office

January 20, 2001: Bush administration
reverses the recognition
Duwamish were recognized for one day.

2009: Obama administration reverses reversal
Recognition restored

Then reversed again.

The Duwamish have been granted
and stripped of recognition
multiple times.
Each reversal was a political decision.
Each reversal told the Duwamish:
Your existence as a people
is subject to political convenience.

SEATTLE'S SPECIFIC FAILURE:

The City of Seattle:
- Uses Duwamish land for its entire existence
- Names its most prominent institutions after figures connected to Duwamish history
- Collects property taxes, business taxes, tourism revenue on Duwamish territory
- Has issued land acknowledgments that sometimes omit Duwamish entirely (as documented in UW's own guidance)
- Has provided no material support adequate to the scale of its occupation of Duwamish territory

THE REAL RENT PROGRAM:
Some Seattle residents voluntarily pay
"real rent" to the Duwamish Tribal Community.
This is a voluntary individual program.
Not a city policy.
Not proportional to Seattle's
multi-billion-dollar economy
built on Duwamish land.
Not connected to any formal
government-to-government obligation.

The city that taxes every business
and property on Duwamish land
has no formal revenue sharing
with the Duwamish people.

THE LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT FAILURE:

Seattle's official land acknowledgment
has repeatedly omitted the Duwamish —
the people whose land this most directly is.

When a city omits the primary
Indigenous people of its land
from its own acknowledgment
of Indigenous peoples —

That is not an oversight.
That is a structural choice.
The choice reveals the limit
of commitment to Indigenous recognition:

It extends only as far as
it creates no obligation.

Acknowledging the Duwamish creates obligation.
The city has chosen acknowledgment
without obligation.
That is not acknowledgment.
That is the performance of acknowledgment
in place of acknowledgment itself.
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HEALTHCARE — THE CRISIS IN SPECIFIC

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THE DATA:

American Indian/Alaska Native people
in King County experience:

MORTALITY:
• Life expectancy significantly below
  county average
• Premature death rates disproportionate
• Leading causes: Heart disease, cancer,
  unintentional injuries, diabetes, liver disease
• Each of these is connected to:
  - Poverty (structural, not individual)
  - Historical trauma
  - Displacement from traditional food systems
  - Inadequate healthcare access
  - Environmental racism

MENTAL HEALTH:
• Suicide rates among AI/AN youth
  2-3x national average
• PTSD rates elevated due to:
  - Intergenerational trauma from
    residential schools
  - Ongoing discrimination and racism
  - Family separation legacy
  - Cultural disruption
• Substance use disorders at elevated rates

- Directly connected to trauma
- Not a cultural characteristic
- A trauma response

MATERNAL HEALTH:
• AI/AN women face higher rates of maternal mortality and morbidity
• Inadequate prenatal care access
• Provider bias documented in research
• Birth outcomes worse than county average
• This is happening in Seattle. In 2026.

SPECIFIC HEALTHCARE FAILURES:

FAILURE 1: URBAN IHS ACCESS GAP

Indian Health Service serves
reservation-based populations primarily.
70%+ of Indigenous Americans
live in urban areas.
Urban Indigenous people have:
• Reduced or no IHS access
• Dependent on mainstream healthcare systems that are not culturally competent
• Higher uninsurance rates
• Higher rates of Medicaid dependency with its access limitations

Seattle Indian Health Board (SIHB)
exists to address this gap.
It is genuinely important.
It serves approximately 5,000 patients.
35,000+ Indigenous people live in King County.

The gap between 5,000 served
and 35,000+ in county is
not a SIHB failure.
It is a funding and capacity failure.
SIHB cannot be everything.
The city and county have not
invested to make it adequate.

FAILURE 2: CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN

## MAINSTREAM HEALTHCARE

When Indigenous patients access
mainstream Seattle healthcare:

- Providers largely untrained in Indigenous health history and context
- Historical trauma and medical mistrust not understood or addressed
- Traditional healing approaches not respected or integrated
- Interpreters often unavailable for Indigenous languages
- Spiritual and ceremonial needs not accommodated in hospital settings
- Bias documented in pain management (Indigenous patients undertreated for pain relative to white patients)

King County's healthcare institutions
do not systematically require
Indigenous cultural competency training.
This is a policy choice.

## FAILURE 3: BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Indigenous-specific behavioral health
services in Seattle are:

- Inadequate in number
- Often not tribally-run or Indigenous-led
- Not sufficiently integrated with cultural and traditional healing practices
- Under-resourced relative to documented need
- Largely not available in Indigenous languages
- Not designed around Indigenous concepts of wellness and healing

Healing practices like:

- Talking circles
- Sweat lodge ceremonies
- Traditional plant medicine
- Elder guidance and mentorship
- Land-based healing

Are not integrated into
King County's behavioral health system.

They exist in Indigenous-led spaces
that the county does not fund adequately.

FAILURE 4: COVID-19 IMPACT

AI/AN communities nationally experienced
some of the highest COVID-19 death rates.
In King County:

- Indigenous community disproportionately affected
- Urban Indigenous people faced:
  - Housing density risk
  - Essential worker exposure
  - Healthcare access barriers
  - Economic devastation
- Vaccine distribution did not specifically prioritize urban Indigenous populations initially
- SIHB and community organizations did significant outreach work that the county should have been doing

FAILURE 5: MISSING AND MURDERED
INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS (MMIWG)

This is not a distant national crisis.
It is a Seattle crisis.

Washington State has one of the highest
rates of MMIWG cases nationally.
King County includes Seattle.

- Indigenous women and girls go missing at rates dramatically higher than their population percentage
- Cases receive less media attention than missing white women and girls
- Law enforcement response documented as inadequate
- Family notifications delayed
- Cases go cold faster
- Tribal sovereignty complications create jurisdiction gaps

• The intersection of homelessness,
substance use disorder, sex work,
and Indigenous identity creates
a profile that law enforcement
has historically deprioritized

Seattle Police Department's response
to MMIWG has not been independently
evaluated and published.
King County's specific MMIWG data
is not compiled and published
in an accessible way.
The families of missing Indigenous women
in Seattle deserve better than this silence.

FAILURE 6: ELDER CARE

Indigenous elders in Seattle:
• Face elder care systems with
no cultural competency
• Have specific ceremonial and
spiritual needs unmet in
nursing homes and assisted living
• May speak Indigenous languages
with no available interpretation
• Have traditional relationship to
death and dying that is not
respected in medical settings
• Experience highest rates of
elder abuse and neglect nationally
with lowest rates of reporting
• Have pension and Social Security
complications from name changes,
relocation, or residential school disruption

There is no Indigenous-led elder care
facility in Seattle.
None is being planned.
The need is entirely unaddressed
in city policy.
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HOUSING — THE DISPOSSESSION CONTINUES

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THE NUMBERS:

AI/AN people in King County:
• Experience homelessness at rates
  dramatically disproportionate
  to their population percentage
• AI/AN people are approximately 1%
  of King County population
• Represent significantly higher
  percentage of homeless population
• Face highest barriers to housing
  stability of any demographic group

THE CAUSES:

HISTORICAL DISPOSSESSION:
The land was taken.
Wealth was not accumulated.
Intergenerational wealth transfer
that has built white homeownership
in Seattle for generations
was systematically denied to
Indigenous families.

Redlining: Indigenous people
were explicitly excluded from
FHA loans that built
post-WWII American homeownership.

Relocation programs:
Federal Indian Relocation Act of 1956
moved tens of thousands of
Indigenous people to cities
including Seattle
with promises of employment and housing.
The employment was low-wage.
The housing was substandard.
The promised support evaporated.
The community was transported
away from their homelands
and deposited in a city
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where they had no roots.

THE CURRENT HOUSING SYSTEM FAILS:

SHELTER SYSTEM:
Seattle's shelter system for
Indigenous people:
- Lacks dedicated Indigenous-affirming spaces
- Does not incorporate traditional healing or cultural practices
- Does not address the specific trauma of urban displacement
- Does not connect to tribal nation resources
- Does not help people reconnect to their home communities if desired
- Operates on timelines and rules designed for non-Indigenous populations
- Has documented discrimination in intake processes

SWEEPS AND DISPLACEMENT:
Seattle's encampment sweeps
disproportionately affect Indigenous
people experiencing homelessness.

Each sweep:
- Destroys belongings including sacred items, ceremonial objects, medicines, and irreplaceable cultural items
- Separates people from support networks
- Moves people further from the services they know
- Re-traumatizes people with histories of forced removal (the historical echo of sweeps for a community whose grandparents were forcibly removed from their lands is not a coincidence — it is a continuation)

GENTRIFICATION:
Urban Indigenous community infrastructure —
cultural centers, gathering spaces,
affordable housing clusters,
informal support networks —

has been systematically displaced
by Seattle's gentrification.

The International District,
historically home to communities
of color including Indigenous people,
has faced gentrification pressure
that displaces the community
while repurposing the neighborhood
for higher-income residents.

THE CASCADIA BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE
AND HOUSING INTERSECTION:
Mental health crises that result
in hospitalization often result in
housing loss for Indigenous people
who cannot maintain rent while
in psychiatric crisis.
The connection between behavioral
health, housing, and Indigenous
community is not addressed
as an integrated system.

NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY HOUSING:
Dedicated Indigenous-led housing
organizations in Seattle include:
Chief Seattle Club
— serves urban Indigenous people
— genuinely essential work
— chronically underfunded
— cannot meet scale of need

The city has not invested
in Indigenous-led housing
at anything close to
the scale of need.
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## **EDUCATION — THE ONGOING WOUND**

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THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL LEGACY:

This cannot be separated from
any discussion of education.

Pacific Northwest Indigenous children
were sent to:
• Chemawa Indian School (Oregon)
• Tulalip Indian School
• Fort Spokane Boarding School
• Multiple other institutions

What happened there:
• Children forcibly separated from families
• Language forbidden — beaten for speaking
  Indigenous languages
• Culture systematically destroyed
• Physical, sexual, and psychological
  abuse documented and widespread
• Children died — unmarked graves
  being discovered across North America
• Survivors returned to communities
  traumatized, disconnected, and
  often unable to parent
  because they had never been parented
  — only institutionalized

The last residential schools in
the United States operated until 1978.
1978.
Not 1878.
1978.

Parents of Indigenous students
in Seattle public schools TODAY
may have attended residential schools.
Grandparents certainly did.

When those parents interact with
Seattle's public school system —
a government institution
that demands their children's attendance —
they carry the embodied memory
of what government education meant
to their family.

That is not paranoia.
That is rational response to
documented historical reality.
Seattle's school system has not
adequately addressed this context.

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FAILURES:

FAILURE 1: ACHIEVEMENT GAP
AI/AN students in Seattle Public Schools
have among the lowest:
• Graduation rates
• Math and reading proficiency rates
• College enrollment rates
Of any demographic group.

This is not a gap created by
Indigenous students' deficiencies.
It is a gap created by a school
system that was designed for
and by non-Indigenous culture
and has not adequately adapted
to serve Indigenous students.

FAILURE 2: CURRICULUM
Washington State now requires
teaching of tribal history and culture.
Since Since (Since) the law was passed:
• Implementation is inconsistent
• Many teachers lack adequate training
• Curriculum materials are insufficient
• Indigenous history is still taught
primarily as past-tense subject
rather than living present reality
• Local tribal nations are not
consistently involved in
curriculum development

FAILURE 3: DISCIPLINE DISPARITY
AI/AN students are suspended and expelled
at disproportionate rates in Seattle schools.
The school-to-prison pipeline is real
and specifically documented for

Indigenous students.
Cultural behaviors and responses
to trauma are criminalized in
school discipline systems designed
by and for white middle-class norms.

FAILURE 4: LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION
Indigenous languages are at critical
risk of extinction.
Seattle's schools offer:
- Spanish, French, Japanese, Chinese, Mandarin, Vietnamese language programs
- Virtually no Indigenous language programs

The Lushootseed language —
spoken by local Coast Salish peoples —
is critically endangered.
Seattle's school system is not
part of the solution.
It is part of the problem
by neglecting to offer
Indigenous language education.

FAILURE 5: INDIGENOUS TEACHERS
The percentage of Indigenous teachers
in Seattle Public Schools is
vanishingly small.
Indigenous students seeing themselves
reflected in their teachers matters
for educational outcomes.
This is documented.
Seattle has not addressed it.

HIGHER EDUCATION FAILURES:
(Beyond UW examined previously)

Seattle Colleges system:
- Limited Indigenous student support
- No dedicated Indigenous cultural center
- Inadequate Indigenous Studies offerings
- No documented Indigenous student retention program
- Financial aid processes not designed for Indigenous students navigating

tribal scholarships alongside
federal aid

The transition from high school
to higher education is where
Indigenous student dropout concentrates.
Seattle's community college system
has not addressed this adequately.
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ECONOMIC JUSTICE — THE WEALTH GAP

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THE STRUCTURAL REALITY:

The land of Seattle —
worth hundreds of billions of dollars —
was Indigenous land.

The wealth generated on that land
for 170+ years has flowed to:
• Non-Indigenous landowners
• Non-Indigenous businesses
• Non-Indigenous institutions
• Non-Indigenous government entities

Indigenous people have received:
• Poverty
• Displacement
• Inadequate services
• Broken promises

THE CURRENT ECONOMIC PICTURE:

AI/AN people in King County:
• Have median household income
  significantly below county median
• Have higher poverty rates
• Have higher unemployment rates
• Have lower rates of business ownership
• Have lower rates of homeownership
• Have higher rates of food insecurity

• Have higher rates of uninsurance

SPECIFIC ECONOMIC FAILURES:

FAILURE 1: PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACTING
Seattle city contracting:
• Does not specifically prioritize
  Indigenous-owned businesses
  as a distinct category
• WMBE (Women and Minority Business
  Enterprise) programs group Indigenous
  businesses with all minority businesses
  without specific Indigenous set-asides
• Federal Indian preference in contracting
  does not apply to city contracts
• Indigenous entrepreneurs face
  additional barriers:
  - Capital access (no intergenerational wealth)
  - Credit history gaps
  - Network exclusion from
    predominant business communities

FAILURE 2: GAMING REVENUE DISTRIBUTION
Washington tribes with gaming operations
generate significant revenue.
Some of that revenue funds
social services for tribal members.
But urban Indigenous people who
are not enrolled members of
gaming tribes receive none of this.
The benefits of tribal economic
development are not designed
to reach all Indigenous people.
The city has not created programs
to bridge this gap.

FAILURE 3: TECH ECONOMY EXCLUSION
Seattle is a global tech hub.
Amazon, Microsoft, Boeing, Starbucks.
Billions in wealth generated annually
on Indigenous land.

Indigenous people in Seattle
are almost entirely excluded from

this wealth generation.
- No specific Indigenous tech pipeline programs at scale
- No Indigenous entrepreneurship incubators connected to Seattle's tech ecosystem
- No corporate accountability for Indigenous representation
- No land acknowledgment translated into economic obligation by any major Seattle corporation

Amazon's campus sits on
Duwamish territory.
Amazon has a land acknowledgment.
Amazon has no documented material
economic relationship with
the Duwamish people.

FAILURE 4: ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMIC HARM
The Duwamish River —
named for the Duwamish people —
is one of the most polluted
waterways in the country.

The lower Duwamish is a
federal Superfund site.
Contaminated by:
- Boeing industrial discharge
- Municipal combined sewer overflow
- Industrial runoff over decades

The Duwamish people:
- Watched their river be destroyed
- Have treaty rights to fish in it
- Cannot safely eat fish from it due to contamination
- Were not compensated
- Were not consulted before the pollution occurred
- Have received inadequate attention in the cleanup process

The EPA's cleanup plan

has been challenged as insufficient.
The Duwamish Tribe has not been
given adequate decision-making power
over cleanup of the river
that bears their name
and where their treaty rights exist.

This is environmental racism.
This is economic harm.
This is treaty violation.
All simultaneously.
In Seattle.
In 2026.
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THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

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THE NUMBERS:

AI/AN people in Washington State:
• Incarcerated at rates dramatically
  disproportionate to population
• AI/AN people are approximately 2%
  of Washington's population
• Represent significantly higher
  percentage of incarcerated population
• Face higher rates of:
  - Pre-trial detention
  - Longer sentences for equivalent offenses
  - Probation and parole violations
  - Juvenile system involvement

THE PIPELINE IN SEATTLE:

STEP 1: POVERTY CRIMINALIZATION
• Homelessness → citation, trespass, loitering
• Food insecurity → theft
• Substance use disorder → drug charges
• Mental health crisis → criminal response
  rather than healthcare response
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STEP 2: POLICE INTERACTION
Seattle Police Department and Indigenous people:

- Documented racial disparity in stops and citations
- Less likely to receive diversion to services rather than prosecution
- More likely to be subject to use of force
- Officers largely untrained in Indigenous cultural context
- Language barriers for Indigenous language speakers

STEP 3: THE COURTS
Seattle Municipal Court and
King County Superior Court:

- Public defenders with overwhelming caseloads cannot provide adequate representation
- Indigenous cultural context not adequately considered in sentencing
- Tribal court jurisdiction complications create gaps where Indigenous people fall through both systems
- No Indigenous-specific court (like the successful Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts on reservations) operating adequately in Seattle

STEP 4: INCARCERATION
King County Jail:

- No Indigenous-specific programming
- No access to traditional spiritual practices
- No smudging, no sage, no ceremony
- Chaplaincy services not adequately addressing Indigenous spiritual needs
- Sweat lodge access: nonexistent
- Elder visitation for cultural guidance: not systematically provided
- Re-entry services: not designed for Indigenous people returning to urban community

STEP 5: RE-ENTRY
After release:

- Housing barriers (criminal record)
- Employment barriers (criminal record)
- No Indigenous-specific re-entry support
- Supervision requirements that conflict with cultural obligations (ceremony attendance, seasonal harvesting)
- Cycle repeats

MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS — THE SPECIFIC FAILURE:

This deserves its own section
because it is the most acute
crisis and the most acute failure.

Washington State:
- Has one of the highest MMIWG case counts in the country
- Seattle and King County are significant geographic concentrations

What Seattle does NOT have:
- Adequate dedicated law enforcement resources for MMIWG cases
- A published, accessible database of MMIWG cases in King County
- Specific protocols for MMIWG investigations that address the unique jurisdictional, cultural, and community dynamics
- Adequate family notification and support services
- Media accountability for the documented disparity in coverage of missing Indigenous women vs. missing white women
- Community-led MMIWG task force with actual investigative authority

Governor Inslee signed legislation
requiring MMIWG data collection.
The State Patrol has a unit.
BUT:

The data collection is incomplete.
The unit is underfunded.
The families are still waiting.
The cases are still going cold.
The women are still going missing.
And Seattle's response is still
inadequate to the scale of the crisis.

This is not a distant rural crisis.
Women are going missing in Seattle.
In this city.
And the response does not match
the scale of the emergency.
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## **CULTURAL ERASURE AND PRESERVATION**

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THE ACTIVE ERASURE:

PLACE NAMES:
Seattle has systematically replaced
Indigenous place names with
European colonial names.

• Duwamish River: The Duwamish call it
  the Dkhw'Duw'Absh — their name for
  themselves and their river
• Elliott Bay: Indigenous name erased
• Lake Washington: Indigenous name erased
• Lake Union: Indigenous name erased
• Every Seattle neighborhood:
  Built over Indigenous place names
  that encoded ecological, cultural,
  and spiritual knowledge
  accumulated over thousands of years

This is not trivial.
Place names are maps of relationship
between people and land.
Erasing them erases the knowledge
of how to live with that land.

MASCOTS AND APPROPRIATION:
Washington state sports teams
and school mascots have used
Indigenous imagery, names, and
cultural symbols for commercial purposes.

While national conversation has led
to some changes (NFL Washington team),
many local schools still use
Indigenous mascots.

In Seattle and King County:
- Some schools retain Indigenous mascots
- Tribal nations have formally objected
- Washington Legislature passed bill requiring schools to change Indigenous mascots — with exceptions and timelines that allow continuation
- Enforcement is inadequate

CULTURAL SITES:
Culturally significant sites in Seattle:
- Often not protected
- Often not publicly identified
- Subject to development pressure
- Not adequately considered in environmental review processes

LANGUAGE:
Lushootseed:
- Language of the Duwamish, Muckleshoot, Puyallup, Suquamish, Tulalip and other Coast Salish peoples
- Critically endangered
- Estimated fewer than a handful of fully fluent first-language speakers remaining

Seattle:
- No systematic funding for Lushootseed revitalization
- No Lushootseed in public schools
- No requirement that city signage

or communications include Lushootseed
• No Lushootseed radio or media
• The language of the people
whose land this city sits on
is dying
and the city is not treating it
as the emergency it is

A language dying is not like
a building being torn down.
It is like an entire way of
understanding the world
being permanently ended.
The knowledge encoded in Lushootseed —
about the land, the water,
the plants, the animals,
the relationships between them —
is irreplaceable.
When the last speaker dies
without the language having been
transmitted to the next generation,
that knowledge is gone forever.

Seattle is not treating this
as the irreversible catastrophe it is.

SACRED SITES AND REPATRIATION:

Beyond UW (examined in previous synthesis):
Seattle's museum and cultural institutions hold:
• Artifacts removed from Indigenous communities
• Objects of cultural patrimony
• In some cases human remains

NAGPRA requires repatriation.
Implementation is slow.
Some institutions have not completed
NAGPRA compliance.
Some items have been in institutions
for over a century.

The families who made those objects,
who buried those remains with ceremony,
who carried that cultural knowledge —

their descendants are in Seattle
asking for what belongs to them.
And institutions are responding
on institutional timelines
rather than with the urgency
the situation deserves.
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ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE — THE DUWAMISH RIVER

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THIS DESERVES DEEP EXAMINATION:

The Duwamish River Superfund site
is one of the most concentrated
examples of Seattle's failure
to its Indigenous community.

THE HISTORY:

Pre-contact:
The Duwamish River delta was
one of the most productive
salmon habitats in the Pacific Northwest.
The Duwamish people built their
entire civilization around it.
Salmon was not just food.
It was identity, ceremony, relationship,
and spiritual life.

Industrial era:
• River was straightened and channelized
  (destroying salmon habitat)
• Industrial facilities built along banks
• Boeing's Renton plant discharges
  beginning mid-20th century
• Municipal sewer overflows
• Multiple industrial contaminants:
  PCBs, arsenic, lead, carcinogenic compounds
• The river became a toxic waste site

The Duwamish people watched this happen.

They had no political power to stop it.
Their treaty rights to fish in this river
were rendered meaningless
by the destruction of the river itself.

CURRENT STATUS:

Lower Duwamish Waterway:
- Federal Superfund site since 2001
- Cleanup cost estimated at $342 million+
- Cleanup plan finalized 2014
- STILL NOT COMPLETE in 2026
- Contamination levels still unsafe for regular fish consumption
- The Duwamish Tribe and other tribal nations have repeatedly said the cleanup plan is insufficient

WHO IS PAYING:
Boeing, King County, City of Seattle,
and Port of Seattle are
the "potentially responsible parties."
They are the polluters.
They are funding the cleanup.
But:
- They have significant influence over what the cleanup plan is
- The people who bear the burden of the contamination — the Duwamish and other Indigenous people who have treaty rights to fish these waters — have not had equal power in designing the cleanup

THE FISH ADVISORY REALITY:

Current fish consumption advisories
for the Lower Duwamish:
- Non-Indigenous residents: Advised to limit consumption
- Indigenous people with treaty

rights and cultural fishing practices:
Advised to limit consumption

But for Indigenous communities
where salmon is not just nutrition
but ceremony, culture, and identity —
telling them not to eat salmon
from their treaty-guaranteed waters
is not a health advisory.
It is a continuation of dispossession.

They were promised these waters.
The waters were poisoned.
The cleanup is inadequate.
The treaty promise remains broken.

THE GREEN RIVER WATERSHED:

Beyond the Duwamish River:
• Green River valley: Traditional
Muckleshoot territory
• Significant development pressure
• Environmental impacts on
traditional plant gathering areas
• Water rights conflicts
• Climate change impacts on
salmon runs that tribal members
depend on for cultural and
subsistence purposes

Seattle's climate response plan
does not specifically address
impacts on Indigenous communities'
treaty rights and subsistence practices.
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WHAT ACTUALLY EXISTS THAT WORKS

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IN HONEST ACCOUNTING:

CHIEF SEATTLE CLUB:

- Dedicated to urban Indigenous people experiencing homelessness
- Day center, meals, cultural programming
- Housing navigation
- Healthcare access support
- Genuinely essential
- Chronically underfunded
- Cannot meet the scale of need

SEATTLE INDIAN HEALTH BOARD (SIHB):
- Comprehensive health services
- Culturally responsive care
- Dental, behavioral health, primary care, HIV services
- Community Health Representatives
- Genuinely important
- Serves approximately 5,000 patients in a county of 35,000+ Indigenous people

UNITED INDIANS OF ALL TRIBES FOUNDATION:
- Operates Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center in Discovery Park
- Youth programs, elder programs
- Cultural events and gatherings
- Head Start program
- One of the oldest urban Indigenous organizations in the country
- Genuinely important work

URBAN NATIVE EDUCATION ALLIANCE:
- Supports Indigenous student success
- Cultural programming for students
- Family engagement
- Doing essential work with inadequate resources

DUWAMISH LONGHOUSE AND CULTURAL CENTER:
- The Duwamish people's own space
- Cultural programming and events
- Community gathering
- On a small piece of their own land
- Doing remarkable work with minimal city support
- Should be lavishly funded

• Is not

WHAT THESE ORGANIZATIONS SHARE:
They are all doing work
that the city and county
should be funding adequately
but are not.
They exist because Seattle
has not built adequate
public infrastructure
for Indigenous communities.
They fill gaps created by
city and county failure.
They are celebrated as examples
of Indigenous resilience.
Indigenous resilience should not
need to compensate for
government failure.
Resilience in the face of
inadequate support is not
a success story.
It is a story about
what communities can survive
when they are not adequately served.
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THE INTERSECTIONS — WHAT NOBODY IS CONNECTING

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THE CONNECTIONS THAT NEED TO BE MADE:

CONNECTION 1:
INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS + DUWAMISH LAND

The Duwamish people are homeless
on their own land.
Not metaphorically.
Literally.
Enrolled Duwamish members experience
homelessness in Seattle —
on Duwamish territory —
at rates connected to the dispossession

of their community from that land.

The city that profits from
Duwamish land every single day
in property taxes, business revenue,
and tourism income
has no formal obligation to
ensure Duwamish people have housing
on their own territory.

This is the most morally clarifying
statement in this entire synthesis.

CONNECTION 2:
MMIWG + HOMELESSNESS + CRIMINALIZATION

The pipeline from homelessness
to survival sex work
to criminal system contact
to violence
disproportionately ends in
Indigenous women disappearing.

This is not a series of separate issues.
It is one system producing one outcome.
Seattle addresses each piece separately:
• Homelessness policy here
• Sex work criminalization there
• Law enforcement response separately
• MMIWG as a separate crisis

It is one crisis.
Addressing it requires
addressing it as one crisis.

CONNECTION 3:
DUWAMISH RIVER + TREATY RIGHTS +
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY + HEALTH OUTCOMES

Contaminated river →
Cannot fish per treaty rights →
Loss of salmon as cultural food →
Diet shifts to processed foods →
Diabetes, heart disease, obesity →

Higher mortality rates

This is one causal chain.
Seattle's environmental policy,
treaty rights enforcement,
healthcare, and food sovereignty
policy are all connected.
They are addressed by separate
departments that do not
coordinate on this connection.

CONNECTION 4:
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL LEGACY +
CHILD WELFARE + EDUCATION OUTCOMES

Residential school trauma →
Parents who cannot parent
because they were institutionalized →
Children removed to foster care →
(Federal ICWA — Indian Child Welfare Act
— meant to address this, still violated) →
Foster care educational disruption →
Poor educational outcomes →
Poverty → Repeat

Washington State has had documented
ICWA violations.
Indigenous children removed from
families at disproportionate rates.
The residential school system ended.
The child removal pipeline continues.

Seattle's Department of Children,
Youth, and Families does not
adequately prevent this pipeline.

CONNECTION 5:
LANGUAGE LOSS + MENTAL HEALTH

Lushootseed language dying →
Loss of cultural identity framework →
Loss of ancestral knowledge transmission →
Identity disruption →
Mental health crisis →

Suicide

Language revitalization is mental
health intervention.
This is documented.
Seattle has not connected its
mental health investment strategy
to Indigenous language revitalization.

CONNECTION 6:
TECH ECONOMY + GENTRIFICATION +
INDIGENOUS DISPLACEMENT

Amazon and tech economy →
Housing price escalation →
Indigenous community displacement
from affordable neighborhoods →
Loss of community infrastructure →
Social isolation →
Health and mental health decline

Seattle's tech economy —
built on Indigenous land —
is actively displacing
Indigenous people from that land.
For the second time.
By different mechanisms.
With similar effects.

No city policy connects
tech economy growth
to Indigenous community protection.
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THE SPECIFIC POLICY FAILURES SUMMARIZED

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FAILURE 1: DUWAMISH NON-RECOGNITION
City has taken no formal position
supporting federal Duwamish recognition.
City has created no formal government-to-
government relationship with Duwamish.

City has no revenue sharing with Duwamish.
City sometimes omits Duwamish from
official land acknowledgments.

FAILURE 2: HEALTHCARE INFRASTRUCTURE
SIHB serves 5,000 of 35,000+ Indigenous
King County residents.
No plan to close the gap.
No dedicated urban Indigenous
healthcare funding stream.
No cultural competency requirements
for mainstream healthcare providers.

FAILURE 3: HOUSING
No dedicated Indigenous housing
at scale.
Shelter system not culturally safe.
Sweeps disproportionately harm
Indigenous people experiencing homelessness.
No anti-displacement policy specific
to Indigenous communities.

FAILURE 4: EDUCATION
Inadequate implementation of
tribal history curriculum.
No Indigenous language programs
in public schools.
No Indigenous teacher recruitment pipeline.
No specific Indigenous student
retention program.
ICWA violations continue in
child welfare system.

FAILURE 5: CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM
King County Jail has no
Indigenous-specific programming.
No Indigenous-specific court.
MMIWG response is inadequate.
Disproportionate incarceration unaddressed.
No re-entry support designed
for Indigenous people.

FAILURE 6: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
Duwamish River cleanup inadequate.

Treaty fishing rights still impacted
by contamination.
Climate plan doesn't address
Indigenous treaty rights.
No Indigenous consultation requirement
for environmental decisions.

FAILURE 7: ECONOMIC JUSTICE
No Indigenous business set-asides
in city contracting.
No formal economic obligation to
Duwamish for occupation of their land.
Tech corporations on Indigenous land
have no economic relationship
with that land's original people.

FAILURE 8: CULTURAL PRESERVATION
No Lushootseed funding in public schools.
No city investment in language revitalization.
Place name restoration not pursued.
NAGPRA compliance incomplete
at some institutions.
Sacred site protection inadequate.

FAILURE 9: GOVERNANCE
No Indigenous seats on City Council
guaranteed by charter.
No formal government-to-government
relationship with Duwamish.
No Indigenous oversight of city
programs serving Indigenous people.
No published accountability metrics
for Indigenous community outcomes.

FAILURE 10: COORDINATION
No coordinated Indigenous affairs
office with real authority and budget.
Programs for Indigenous people
scattered across multiple departments
without integration.
No published strategic plan
with measurable outcomes
for Indigenous community wellbeing.
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WHAT WOULD ACTUALLY CHANGE THINGS

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ORDERED BY STRUCTURAL IMPACT:

HIGHEST IMPACT:

1. SUPPORT DUWAMISH FEDERAL RECOGNITION
   City of Seattle should:
   • Pass formal resolution supporting
     Duwamish federal recognition
   • Lobby Washington delegation
     to support legislation
   • Create formal government-to-government
     relationship with Duwamish now
     regardless of federal status
   • Establish revenue sharing agreement
     based on economic activity on
     Duwamish territory
   This is the single most important action.

2. INVEST IN INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE
   • Establish Indigenous Affairs Office
     with dedicated budget ($50M+ annually)
   • Led by Indigenous people,
     not by non-Indigenous city employees
   • Accountable to Indigenous community,
     not just to Mayor
   • Authority to direct spending
     across all city departments
     affecting Indigenous people

3. DEDICATE HEALTHCARE FUNDING
   • Fund SIHB expansion to serve
     all 35,000+ Indigenous King County residents
   • Require Indigenous cultural competency
     training for all city-contracted
     healthcare providers
   • Fund traditional healing integration
     in behavioral health system
   • Create Indigenous maternal health program
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with zero disparity goal

4. MMIWG EMERGENCY RESPONSE
- Dedicated unit with adequate staffing
- Published King County MMIWG database
- Community-led family support services
- Media accountability initiative
- Legislative push for stronger MMIWG response requirements

5. DUWAMISH RIVER CLEANUP ACCELERATION
- City formally demands EPA cleanup upgrade
- City funds additional cleanup beyond responsible party contributions
- Duwamish Tribe has formal decision-making role in cleanup design and oversight
- Establish fish consumption safety as specific measurable cleanup goal tied to treaty rights restoration

MEDIUM IMPACT:

6. LUSHOOTSEED IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Fund Lushootseed language program in every Seattle public school beginning in elementary school. Partner with Lushootseed speakers for curriculum development. Create Lushootseed teacher training and certification program. This is both language revitalization and mental health investment.

7. INDIGENOUS HOUSING AT SCALE
Fund 500+ units of Indigenous-led culturally affirming housing in Seattle. Create anti-displacement policy protecting Indigenous community gathering spaces and cultural centers. End sweeps that disproportionately harm Indigenous people experiencing homelessness without providing culturally safe alternatives.

8. KING COUNTY JAIL REFORM
- Indigenous cultural programs required
- Sweat lodge access required
- Elder visitation for cultural guidance
- Traditional medicine access
- Re-entry support designed for urban Indigenous people

9. TECH CORPORATION ACCOUNTABILITY

Pass ordinance requiring technology companies whose campuses sit on Duwamish territory to:

- Include land acknowledgment in all annual reports
- Contribute to Duwamish community fund based on revenue generated on their territory
- Hire Indigenous employees at rate proportional to King County Indigenous population

This is politically complex.
It is morally clear.

10. CHILD WELFARE REFORM

ICWA compliance and enforcement.
Indigenous family preservation investment.
Indigenous foster family recruitment.
No child removed from Indigenous family without tribal consultation.
Measure and publish outcomes.

LONG TERM:

11. LAND RETURN

Begin formal process of returning portions of city-owned land to Duwamish and other Indigenous nations.
Discovery Park — built on land seized from Indigenous people — is a specific candidate for meaningful land return conversation.

12. TREATY RIGHTS RESTORATION

Work with federal government

to fully restore and fund
Point Elliott Treaty obligations.
Healthcare. Education. Land.
171 years overdue.

13. CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT
Charter amendment guaranteeing
Indigenous representation on
Seattle City Council.
Not consultation.
Representation.
With voting power.
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## **CLOSING SYNTHESIS**

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THE HONEST SUMMARY:

Seattle was built on Indigenous land.
The people whose land this is
were promised protection, healthcare,
education, and treaty rights.

Instead they received:
• 171 years of broken promises
• Residential schools that destroyed
  families and killed children
• A poisoned river where their
  treaty-guaranteed salmon once ran
• Homelessness on their own land
• A city that bears their leader's name
  and omits his people from its
  official land acknowledgments
• Healthcare gaps that take lives
• Schools that erase their languages
• A criminal legal system that
  incarcerates them at disproportionate rates
• Missing women whose cases
  do not receive adequate attention
• Gentrification that displaces them
  from their own territory for the

second time in 170 years

WHAT SEATTLE HAS INSTEAD OF JUSTICE:
Land acknowledgments without obligation.
Showcase programs without scale.
Good laws without enforcement.
Consultative relationships without power.
Cultural celebrations without structural change.

THE PATTERN:
Seattle performs reconciliation
while maintaining the economic and
political structures that perpetuate dispossession.

The performance is sophisticated.
The land acknowledgments are eloquent.
The Intellectual House is beautiful.
The Seattle Indian Health Board
does remarkable work.

And:
The Duwamish River is still contaminated.
Duwamish women are still going missing.
Duwamish people are still homeless
on their own land.
The Duwamish are still fighting
for the recognition promised to them
in 1855.

These two things —
the beautiful performance
and the ongoing dispossession —
exist simultaneously.

The performance is designed to make
the dispossession invisible.

Making the dispossession visible
is the first act of genuine accountability.

This synthesis is that act.

WHAT JUSTICE LOOKS LIKE:
Not more acknowledgment.

Power.
Revenue.
Land.
Recognition.
Self-determination.
Enforcement of promises made
in 1855 and every year since.

The Duwamish have been resilient
for 171 years of broken promises.

That resilience is not a reason
to continue breaking promises.

It is a testament to what was taken.
And what is still owed.

"The land remembers.
The river remembers.
The salmon remember.
The people remember.

When will the city remember?"
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The tide carries everything
that was lost at sea.
The question is whether
the shore is ready
to receive what returns.

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